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Coke Bottles and Teddy Bears

By Dr. Wess Stafford (African MK)
President and CEO of
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"Hey, kid, whaddya say?" With a grandiose gesture, the greasy little Coney Island barker with the droop-down mustache presented his carnival stand. His beady lizard eyes glared out from behind wire-rim glasses.

I understood every word of his question but didn't have a clue what he meant. In the village where I had grown up with my missionary parents and older sister, the word *kid* most often referred to a baby goat. And "What do I say?" I was mystified. In this country, so far from what I had assumed was the center of the earth, were kids each assigned something to say? Was this some kind of branding to keep track of so many children in this vast city they called New York?

"I don't know what I say," I finally stammered, embarrassed.

This man was only the second American I had met since disembarking the day before from the *SS Rotterdam*. His gruffness reminded me of the first American, a Manhattan taxi driver. In a fifteen-minute ride, he had assaulted everything I held dear—lessons learned around the campfire in the evenings from the wise village chief and his elders, not to mention my parents. As we careened through crowded streets lined with skyscrapers, the driver's frustrations with life cut deeply into the tender spirit of America's newest fourteen-year-old. His horn didn't honk in friendly greeting, and as I later learned, that wasn't a warm salute he gave with his left hand out the window. The traffic light changing from green to red brought a flurry of what I thought was English, but they were words I had certainly never picked up from the missionary community. My instincts told me to tread lightly here. There was much about this place I didn't understand.

Now on the Coney Island midway I was still moving with caution. The obnoxious man snapped, "Don't know what ya say? Yo, stupido, ya want one o' these colossal teddy bears or not? All ya gotta do is break the bottles. It's easy!"

I looked him over, as if sizing up prey in the jungle. Was he dangerous? He wore a cocked beret just like the French officials whose convoys occasionally stormed into our dusty village in their Jeeps, barking orders and demanding answers to perplexing questions. I didn't like this barker, didn't understand him, and didn't trust his shifty eyes and raspy voice. I backed away as I would have from a showdown with a panther.

At a safe distance I began studying the gaudy carnival stand. It was painted in loud, clashing colors. Behind the counter, about fifteen feet back, were three rickety shelves lined with Coke bottles. On the ground were glass shards that crunched as the man swaggered back and forth, harassing all who passed by. On the front railing lay half a dozen slingshots and a large jar of colorful marbles.

I did a double take, my eyes riveting on the slingshots. Finally! In this noisy, glitzy, crowded city, here was something familiar. Since I was six years old, a slingshot had hung every night from the post of my cot. It was the first thing I picked up every morning, draping it around my neck. To the boys in my village, slingshots were not just toys; they were homemade weapons, status symbols, and, yes, clothing. I smiled as I remembered that for some of my poverty-stricken African buddies, their slingshots around their necks were all they wore.

"Three shots! Twenty-five cents! Step right up!" The barker's staccato eruptions snapped me back to the reality of New York. Flashing

IN THIS ISSUE

between these radically different worlds would become a way of life for me in the months to come. Such sudden transitions would often leave me speechless as I tried to determine which of my four languages to use. Dyoula? Senari? French? No, it had to be English, which was my weakest.

High on both sides of the carnival stand were the most beautiful teddy bears I'd ever seen. I had read Winnie-the-Pooh books in Africa at noon rest, and these were just as I envisioned Pooh Bear to be. They were huge and impressive, like full-grown male baboons. The man may have been repugnant, but he clearly knew what he had: the biggest and best prizes on the midway.

A group of boys about my age came by and got the full treatment from my tormentor. They eyed the huge prizes, fingered the slingshots awkwardly, and huddled near the counter. They pointed at the prizes, punched each other on the arm, and speculated about whether to take the chance.

Finally one little guy was pushed to the front and hesitantly plunked down his quarter. The second he picked up the slingshot, I could tell he didn't have a clue what he was doing. As he gripped the handle in his left hand, I could see his nervousness. With contorted face and squinting eyes, he pinched the leather pouch with his right hand and shakily pulled the rubber bands back.

I cringed, not sure if the next action would be the marble flying or the slingshot crotch planted firmly in his nostrils. Luckily, he let go of the proper end first. The marble limped forward pitifully, thudding softly against the canvas backdrop. The next two marbles were equally futile. Amid laughter and insults, the boy retreated into the group. I smiled.

Another boy tried, then a third. The booth man taunted them mercilessly. "Three lousy bottles. What's so hard about that? Come on, ain't any of ya man enough?" I thought of that same taunt from the giant Goliath just before his downfall. The boys shook their heads. With shoulders slumped, they slunk away. This was not only not fun; it obviously couldn't be done.

With the crowd gone, my camouflage disappeared, and there I stood once again, exposed. Just me and this pint-sized Goliath with the big mouth and the big prizes.

"Hey, you! Skinny kid! What ya scared of? C'mon, give it a try!" I could take all of his insults except for the insinuation that I was scared. In my village that dare would provoke any of us young warriors to do absolutely anything.

I approached him and pointed to the prizes overhead. "What do I have to do?"

"You take this slingshot and three marbles out of the jar. You shoot; you break three bottles; you win the prize!"

Now who is the stupido? I thought. Back in my village every kid was a slingshot virtuoso. We prided ourselves on driving baboons out of the cornfields, herding cattle, killing poisonous snakes, and shooting the eye out of any lizard foolish enough to poke its head over a mud wall—all with stones aimed with surgical precision. I wasn't up to the skill level of my African friends, but I could pretty much hold my own.

As I surveyed the booth's challenge, I thought, *What's the problem? There must be a trick to make this hard. The bottles are no more than fifteen feet away. They aren't even swinging on a rope or anything—they're stationary! Maybe they're unbreakable.*

But then why all the glass on the ground? This is simple.

On our ocean crossing I had practiced recognizing American coins. I now pulled a quarter out of my pocket. I remembered when coins and paper money had come to our village to take the place of cowrie shells. We weren't sure the new currency could be trusted. How could anything be valuable if you could burn it or melt it?

Surrounded by the buzz of the amusement park, I picked up the slingshot. It felt comfortable and familiar in my hand, like a long-lost friend.

"Do I have to hold it like the other guys did?" I asked. Maybe that was the catch.

"Naw, hold it any way ya want, kid. Just pull it back and break the bottle. Is that too hard?"

I began wrapping my left thumb and forefinger around the two prongs of the slingshot, burying the handle deep into my palm the way I knew would guarantee steadiness. Engulfed, the slingshot was an extension of my arm.

The man snickered. "Never seen anybody hold it like that before. If ya hurt yourself, I'm not responsible!"

I picked a shiny marble out of the jar. This was going to be even easier than I thought. Unlike the irregular stones we had to use in the village that required an extra calculation before firing, these totally smooth and perfectly spherical marbles were guaranteed to fly straight and true.

I raised the slingshot, pulled back the rubber, and with one flashing flick of my wrist, *splink*! went a bottle on the far end. A shower of glass exploded in all directions. The man stared at me while brushing bits of glass from his hair and clothing.

"Whoa, beginner's luck, huh?" he growled hopefully.

"Well, maybe not," I replied as I picked up another marble. *Blam*! Down went the second bottle. A crowd was beginning to grow behind me.

"I'm guessin' you've done this before, kid," the man hissed.

"Well, yeah, we do this where I come from," I answered. With that, I picked up my third marble and pulverized the third bottle. The crowd cheered. Little Goliath winced.

Success—my first in America! My village buddies would have doubled over with laughter at my having won such a huge victory with so little challenge.

"Okay, I'll have that big brown bear with the black nose, way up there!" I said, pointing.

"Not so fast, not so fast!" the barker sneered. "That's not how it works. I said you'd win *a* prize, not the *grand* prize." With a sarcastic flair, he pulled from under the counter a fuzzy little bear about four inches tall.

I felt foolish. He had conned me after all. "Well," I stammered, "what do I have to do to win the grand prize?"

"Oh, you've got to work up to that. Another quarter, three more marbles. This goes in stages, don't ya know that, kid? Where ya from?"

Fine. I had seen this kind of trickery among

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the Dyoula craftsmen from the village down the road. I plunked down another quarter. Pow, pow, pow. Three more Coke bottles shattered.

"Okay, now I want that big one," I announced with a slight edge in my voice.

The man threw back his head and guffawed. "Well done, hotshot. Now ya get *this* one." He pulled out a ten-inch bear. But when I disgustedly plunged my hand into my pocket to fish for another quarter, he paused.

"Wait just a darned minute. You gonna keep on bustin' all my bottles, ain't ya, kid?"

I nodded, glaring at him through eyes that were now slits of determination.

Reality set in. The guy could see a pattern developing. This skinny little kid was going to shatter all his pop bottles. If he made me work through all four prize levels of his little game, he might earn a lousy buck from me, but he'd lose more than that in bears and bottles. And if I decided to keep playing, he'd have a severely reduced inventory with which to swindle his next victims.

He got out his stick and unhooked my teddy bear—the huge brown one with the black nose. "Look, kid, just take this miserable bear and get outta my face!" he snapped.

I smiled as I walked away with my prize. The crowd was silent for a moment, then relished the drama that had just played out in front of them. Good had triumphed over evil. They broke out in wild cheers and applause.

What a strange and wonderful country, this United States of America. I came; I saw; I conquered.

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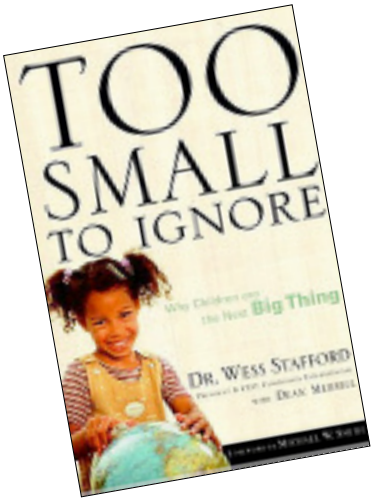

Return to Home

Trip to Bountiful—Rendel Style

By Nancy (Rendel) Henry

Archive photo of the Rendel Family

"Do you think we'll have to worry about any snakes or scorpions this time of year? Could a lion get into the kinds of tents we'll be using? Do we have enough water with us?"

These were some of the questions we asked ourselves as we prepared to make the trip from Niamey, Niger, into northwestern Nigeria to see the mission station at Andarai where our parents, George and Betty Rendel, ministered from 1947 to 1967, and where my brothers and I all grew up. My twin brother, Jim, has been serving as a pilot with SIM in Niamey for thirty years now. During this time Jim had circled over the station once but had never actually made a trip there to visit. Since Jim and his wife, Sandy, plan to leave Niger in June 2006, my older brothers, Jack and Bob, and I decided it was time for all of us to visit them and two of their children, Crystal and Scott, and together make this "trip of a lifetime" back to Andarai! (Their oldest son, Jason, is in Canada completing university this spring.)

Ready to leave for Andarai
Back: *Scott, Jack, Jim, Bob*
Front: *Nancy Henry, Sandy, Crystal*

We started out on a Monday morning loaded down with tents, sleeping bags, and food and water for the two-day trip. We were hoping we could cover the three hundred miles in about six hours. The first three hours passed uneventfully, but right at noon the van engine light came on indicating it had overheated. We pulled off the road, but no shady spot was within easy reach. We ate lunch trying to escape the blazing sun in the sparse shadow of the open back door or inside the van while we waited for the engine to cool before adding water. Should we press ahead knowing that Jim's cell phone wouldn't work once we crossed the border into Nigeria? If the problem got worse, would we find the necessary parts to repair it?

But it was out of the question that we would turn back at this point! So we pressed on—without running the air conditioner (!)—trusting God to get us the rest of the way there. We were soon on the worst section of road, having to drive often on the berm to avoid huge potholes on the deteriorated paved road.

Somewhere along there we could see the Kamba hills, a promise that the border was not far off. Kamba was another one of those "end-of-the-line" mission stations in northern Nigeria. The only time I had been there was as a preschooler. I have vague memories of climbing one of the hills with Uncle Harold (Miller).

Finally, we reached the Nigerian checkpoint just before the border. Not too many foreigners pass through this border, so the official wanted to see all our passports and verify that we had

visas to be in Niger in the first place. Since Jim knows Hausa, the local language for many people in both Niger and Nigeria, he could explain what we were all doing there and where we wanted to go. Two other officials sitting in plastic lawn chairs outside under a tree kindly offered the rest of us seats while we waited. No one is in a hurry here . . . it's too hot for anyone to move quickly . . . one should just sit down and chat for a while. . . .

By perhaps 1:30 p.m. we were ready to drive the few miles across "no-man's land" and the unmarked border to start over again with the Nigerian immigration officials! The first official sounded a little gruff as he instructed Jim where to park. But in minutes, Jim had him speaking in Hausa, conversing like a long-time friend. (The officer looked quite smart in his khaki uniform but was sporting a purple washcloth in place of a hat to protect himself from the intense heat of the sun. Hey—whatever works when it's well over 100º F!)

This time we couldn't sit in the shade while Jim did the leg work. All seven of us needed to go into the room marked for "Arrivals" and show our passports one by one as the official recorded each name and passport number by hand. They had been looking for a man named "James" some months ago. Could Jim be their guy? The official poured over previous records looking to see if Jim's passport number matched any of them. Jim talked on in Hausa in his friendly, patient way, and God blessed us with a serendipitous moment in the middle of our tiresome wait. Another man passing through the border was from Birnin Kebbi, where two SIM missionaries had been stationed a number of years ago (Ann Beveridge and Phyllis Lawson). He put his hand over his heart as he spoke of how much they meant to him and had helped him as a boy.

As we pulled away from this office, thinking we could finally continue, we found out that "Customs" is a separate stop from "Immigration." We tumbled out of the hot van once more, waited and talked some more as Jim found out we needed an authorization form to drive in Nigeria. The person who issues them had gone home for a break but someone would go get him. He returned shortly and the form got filled out. But we had to leave the van registration in exchange—no option of returning by a different route at this point.

Diesel fuel was available in Kamba but only in a can. We bought some and moved on. It was 3:45 p.m. before we were on our way. The road was long and slow between Kamba and Kalgo. Several checkpoints, with heavily armed police, also slowed us down, but Jim always greeted them profusely and extensively in Hausa as is the custom, bringing smiles to all, even the passengers in nearby cars. Two hours later we arrived in Kalgo, but no time to look today for the Kalgo station which we all remember fondly!

The road from Kalgo to Jega was like a super highway compared to what we'd been on, so we were there in fifteen minutes. Jega is where Ann Beveridge worked as a nurse for most of her missionary career. (She earned the title "Queen of Jega" with the local people there.) It was the closest station to Andarai, so naturally we visited "Auntie Ann" quite often. Leaving Jega we crossed a modern bridge in seconds (with the old ferry it could take up to two hours, especially in the rainy season) and headed south, anxious to get to Andarai before dark.

It was a great improvement for local travel when the road was paved, but we missed the turns and hills that gave the old dirt road its familiar feel. We also missed the forests along the way—all had been cut down to provide more farmland.

As we approached Andarai, our eyes pierced the dusk, looking for the familiar grove of palm trees. "Yes, there they are!" . . . now on the right as the paved road was laid out further to the east of town. The road merged with the old road just in time to intersect the end of our old familiar driveway. There it was—our childhood paradise of sorts—transformed into quite a different place by the passing of forty years! The nim trees have grown into giants, still framing the house and compound with their shady limbs. The gardens are gone and the lawns are now farmland. One lone lemon tree remains of the fruit trees. The house and the dispensary are in need of a facelift, but the church has been kept in better condition. They all look smaller than what we remember.

We quickly walked to the former dispensary to greet Sanda and Hawa, the couple sent by ECWA (Evangelical Church of West Africa) to take over the station a number of years ago. Hawa clapped her hands and danced a little jig when she found out who we were. Sanda had heard of "Jimmy" for years now and had asked a visiting Southern Baptist missionary a couple years earlier whether he would ever come to visit. He no longer sees well, but he had a big welcoming smile on his face.

Our plan was to lie low for the evening so we could set up camp and eat supper. But a guard at the new hospital being built close to the station saw us at some point, and the word was out—friends soon started arriving. Our former houseboy Alu was notified and arrived shortly. It was with great delight that we greeted him and other friends that remembered us. You can imagine their surprise to have all of us show up totally unexpected after forty years! Alu kept shaking his head, stroking his chin, and saying, "Kai"! They visited for a while and then left us to settle down for the night.

We no longer had to fear the presence of lions and hyenas since, sadly, the forest preserve just south of Andarai is no longer there either. With our late arrival and the sultry still air, we quickly decided not to use any tents. We would sleep out under the stars! We lined up our seven sleeping bags and pads on a cement slab put down by the Italian road crew years ago. We built a fire and cooked hamburgers, reminiscing the whole time about former days. It was hard seeing the toll the years have taken on the house and other buildings, but it was wonderful to have those few relaxed hours sitting by the late night fire, just being there, talking and reminiscing.

A few giant grasshoppers and stray ants kept us company during the night. Domesticated guinea fowl squawked in the trees nearby until we scared them into silence with a few stones and the glare of a flashlight. Most of us finally drifted off for a few hours' sleep. The breeze we had prayed for all night finally came around 5:00 a.m. with such gusto that we feared a possible early rain. By 7 o'clock we were up, relighting the fire to make fresh coffee to sip with our last few moments of privacy.

Before long more friends showed up, many faces still familiar in spite of the years. Jim's wife, Sandy, commented later how "all these old-looking people showed up that knew us"—they were mostly former playmates! We didn't think they looked that old. Sandy is a number of years younger than the rest of us.

Alu's younger brother, Sani, came over, and we were delighted to discover that he spoke English since all of us except Jim have very limited Hausa. His generation was the first at Andarai to get an education. He had gone to university in Sokoto and then worked in rural development in Namibia for nine years. Then he decided to move back to his hometown and try to help with development there. But things are not easy. He taught for two years in the school but was frustrated with the lack of materials. The water table in the area has dropped, and they are facing a potentially serious water

problem. He quietly asked us to remember them. We ask ourselves, "Is there something we could actually do? What is the answer to these and other problems these people face?"

Then, with a big smile on his face, he expressed how much he appreciated what our parents had done for him as a child. My dad had fixed up a bad gash on his forehead following a fall, and it had healed well. He was thankful for the cards and pictures he had received from Mom in Sunday School. He was challenged with what could be done by seeing the fruit trees and gardens our parents had planted. He returned to Andarai in time to get seeds from the last surviving lemon tree and now has seven saplings growing in his yard.

We asked about the small group that meets for church on the compound. Apparently very few, if any, of the local people attend; the Christians are people that have come from other parts of Nigeria for one reason or another. After taking some pictures of the house, we stood in a circle on the front lawn and prayed for our friends and our town. How we long for the light and power of the gospel to break through the spiritual forces that have kept the people in darkness for centuries.

We soon drove over to the village to look around a little and greet some more people, including the chief. Jack commented on the number of children and young people looking at us as if wondering, "Who are these people? Why did they want to visit our town?" Perhaps as the older folks talk about how we grew up there, they will reflect on the reason our parents were there—to tell them about Jesus, the true Savior.

By 10:30 a.m. we began the long trip back to Niamey, feeling the time had been too short but fearing if we stayed much longer, we might not get back before dark. We did take time to stop by the Jega station. It has been completely enveloped by the growing town and was almost unrecognizable. I had always loved the Londons' (later the Aldises') British-style house that had a veranda encircling the entire house. One of the ECWA residents wanted to show us a foundation stone on a later addition to the house. It read, "London, Dec. 1955." Both Paul and Carolyn London are with the Lord now, but this stone remains as a memorial to the fact that they and many others like them followed God's call to go and live in a hard place. For years very few people in parts of northern Nigeria turned to the Lord. Now the ECWA church has people on all these stations with churches meeting at most, if not all, of them. The numbers are still small, but the witness is carrying on in spite of great odds. Please pray for God's church to grow in northern Nigeria!

The trip back went a little more quickly—we were a known entity at the border stops this time around. We never did find the Kalgo station but had a good view of the Kamba station as we returned. As the afternoon wore on, the harmattan began to cloud the sun and lessen the visibility considerably. How thankful we were that it hadn't come a day earlier! Our trip to Andarai and back had been more grueling than we had expected, but oh so worth it. We talked all the way home and are still talking and reminiscing about it. Perhaps a few of our friends at Andarai are too!

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Segers in Rome 1960

Grace Anne and Daniel, 2005

One of the perks of being an MK and growing up overseas for me was the extra time my family took to go through Europe going from Nigeria to the U.S.

On one of our stops, when I was twelve years old, we went to Rome to see, among other things, the Colosseum. (I swear that we found a stone there with SIM carved into it.)

A year ago in May my husband and I took our two sons on a three-week trip though Italy. One of our stops was the Colosseum. I didn't realize it until I got home and started scanning my dad's old slides that I had had my picture taken (in 1960) in exactly the same spot as I had it taken again with my twelve-year-old son. (I looked for the stone with the SIM on it, but couldn't find it.)

Grace Anne (Seger) Swanson (KA, HC 67)

Books

Pero

By Tim Burtner (HC 71)
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Out of his experiences at Hillcrest and at Pero, a Nigerian village east of Jos, Tim Burtner writes a work of fiction about four boys "who become close friends despite very different backgrounds: one is an African Christian, one is a Pagan, one is a Nigerian Muslim, and the last is a white missionary kid from the U.S." Sprinkled liberally with Hausa words, Pero takes us into the heart of the African mind and culture. Along with some earthy content and adult themes, you'll learn plenty about the history of the region in the process. Separated by time and distance, the four young men eventually reunite in a dramatic way.

Reviewed by Karen Keegan

Go to www.Savageriverpress.com where you can check out an excerpt, order the book, and view vintage photos of Tim in Nigeria.

Chameleon Days: An American Boyhood in Ethiopia

By Tim Bascom (BA, GS, RV 79)
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Recently released to high acclaim, Tim Bascom's memoir *Chameleon Days* relates his childhood days in Ethiopia (including his time at Bingham Academy). **Joy Harper (BA, GS 67)** had this to say about Tim's book in a review for amazon.com: Having lived in the house across the street from Tim and his family in Ethiopia for a few years, the book really resonated with me. The memories of the sights and smells were brought back in such a powerful way! When I got the book, I sat down and read the whole thing from cover to cover. When I was finished, I felt like I had actually been there. My children have heard about my childhood Ethiopia for years, and are reading the book as well, and are amazed at all the familiar phrases that they have heard for years from me. It has been enlightening for them to hear another voice from my past. Love this book!

Mike Bergen (BA 74) writes: Tim did a great job presenting his feelings in the book. What disappointed me was that he did not write much about the great things that God was doing through a bunch of great loving, sacrificial, and godly staff at the school.

Someone unfamiliar with the godliness of SIM missionaries and the loving care that has been provided at SIM boarding schools, would have a warped view of SIM missionaries and their schools by reading *Chameleon Days*. His view of boarding school life at Bingham Academy is quite negative and has a heavy focus on his bad memories of the school and even stories of other troublemakers at the school. His description of the spirituality at Bingham was especially disappointing. He describes stoic, unloving people who were carrying out their spiritual duties. I was there during much of the same time and experienced just the opposite. My memories of life at Bingham (grades one through nine) are filled with positive experiences and many examples of how loving the teachers and dorm supervisors were. **Miss McDonald, Miss Newman, Miss Wollman, Miss Wiley, Mr. Ricker, Mr. Reimer, Mr. Wallace, Mr Emmel, Rod & Nancy Johnson, Mr. Giles** are all people who quickly come to mind with many examples of how they were in love with the Lord and how they expressed their love to us students. They had soft hearts toward the Lord and were sacrificing their personal interests out of love for Jesus and a desire to help us kids. I've seen some of them cry when they shared their appreciation for Jesus, and I have many memories of them sharing their hearts with us. Sure my heart hurt the first week after leaving parents, but there was a bunch of godly, loving people who did a great job filling in the gap!

Houghton Mifflin, ISBN 0-618-65869-6
Cost: $12.00

The Way It Really Was

By Doreen Hodges (HC Staff)
royanddoreen@telus.net

This book is my story of 27 years in West Africa. It relates what I experienced living in a rural village at the edge of the Sahara desert; at a large Nigerian leprosarium; in a hostel for our missionary kids at Hillcrest; in Mission headquarters in Nigeria; and in a brief sojourn into more desert in Niger Republic.

There is so much about missionary life in another culture that nobody ever hears about. Usually missionaries are encouraged not to communicate anything even slightly negative. Consequently, they tend to keep the struggles of everyday life to themselves. The weekly letters to my mother were the only outlet for communicating the realities of another seven days. It is in those airforms—typed on a little Smith-Corona that jumped too many spaces; composed under the strain of depleting heat and sopping perspiration; and often completed in the limited light, filtered and flickering through a blackened chimney of a kerosene lamp—that the truth is found. That dedicated weekly discipline was worth the effort because I now have the stored memories which have served as the infrastructure for a book about me and my kids.

In these pages you will follow the story of our missionary life beginning in an isolated Nigerian village; the development of our little family with delightfully happy preschool years together; the adjustments to political unrest and even civil war; the energy and time needed just to live and cope with the frustrations of a developing country; the sadness of many separations from our children as they flew four hundred miles away to boarding school and then ultimately to Canada; the pressures of new ministries for which we felt inadequate; the eventual outcome of mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion.

This book attempts to tidy up all the things that were left unsaid or misunderstood by both parents and children from 1966 to 1987 right up to 2005. As each paragraph came together, I clearly saw the unfolding of our family's story. This narrative became a much larger and deeper endeavor than simply recording cute sayings from cute little kids: it has been a huge emotional and spiritual experience wrapped in wisdom, love, and freedom. It is possible there are other families out there who can identify with us. Perhaps you will find part of your own story in ours.

Cost: $20.00 plus $10.00 shipping

To order the book, read excerpts, and view photos, go to:
http://www3.telus.net/public/maigida/mystory

The Bible or the Axe—One man's dramatic escape from persecution in the Sudan

By William O. Levi

William Levi and his family, Messianic believers from an African Hebrew tribal group in Sudan, were forced to flee religious persecution, and they settled as refugees in Uganda. After returning home, once again persecution drove William out of the country, and he ended up in America where he received the education he longed for. Eventually he founded Operation Nehemiah Missions International and has told his story to millions. He continues to bring awareness to the persecution faced by believers in Sudan and elsewhere.

Moody Publishers. ISBN: 0-8024-1138-X

Open Dialogue

Gratitude Expressed to MKs

Jack Phillips, former KA staff and former SIM Canada Director, shared this story during his tribute to SIM missionary Nancy Cairns (see Sympathies section). His intention was to encourage the Cairns MKs (Ian, Elaine, and Derek). May you also be blessed by this expression of appreciation.

A few years ago the General Secretary of ECWA (Evangelical Church of West Africa), a Nigerian pastor, came to Europe and North America for a speaking tour. At a meeting in Toronto with many SIM missionaries and some missionary kids in attendance, the first thing he did was to take a major amount of his time to address an issue he felt deeply about. He spoke at length about the appreciation the Nigerian church had for the contribution the missionary kids had made to the coming of the Gospel to Nigeria and its dissemination among Nigerians. He specially referred to the substantial sacrifices that missionary kids were required to make because their parents came to Nigeria rather than serving God in their home countries. He thanked God for missionary kids and thanked the kids for their part in multitudes of his countrymen finding new life in Christ. He believed that God would not leave them out in His "Well done, thou good and faithful servants" in that final day!

An American-African speaks up

Daniel Buck (EL, IC 82)
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Not a month goes by without that ominous question staring up at me from some questionnaire or another, and I have to decide. Am I White? African-American? Caucasian? Since I know Spanish fairly well and some of my great-grandparents fifteen times removed were from Spain, am I Hispanic? Or do I just Refuse to Answer?

None of the answers sound quite right, because although my ancestry is 100% European, I grew up in Africa. If they just had "American-African" as an option, I'd check it in a heartbeat. But "my kind of people" still doesn't exist on the radar screen of racial organization. So I'm still wondering just how I fit in. . . .

As TCKs we always had the feeling of being the outsider, so in Africa we stuck around with our MK friends cuz they were "us." Back "home" in America, WE were suddenly "the Africans," and we felt drawn toward African-looking people because now we were "them." To our surprise the "Africans" didn't feel the same way! I experienced my first case of American racial prejudice as a six-year-old boy fresh back from the field, when a bunch of what I took for Liberian kids who talked funny told me I couldn't play on the playground with them because I was white and they were black. Well, that much was obvious to anybody; but what it had to do with being able to play together I couldn't figure out, other than it must have had something to do with the uncomfortable, but unavoidable, fact that I had been born in America, and thus wasn't a "real African." So I pushed forward my two-year-old sister and said, "Well, she ought to be able to play here. She was born in Africa!" To which unexpected information they had no rejoinder, and I sat back in the shade watching my sister happily join in their play.

Twenty years later, I was a sailor on board the USS Jason, which had an "African-American" population of about 50 percent, mostly concentrated in the lower level occupations (as I was at the time). Therefore quite a few of the people I worked with were black, and being in the naval population as somewhat of an outcast myself, I must have had some unconscious attraction to them. I joined the Martin Luther King Day Commemoration Committee, and no one could help noticing that I was the only white person on it. I was the only white person in the Upper Room Prayer Group until dropping out because I preferred to pray in a known tongue. I had to attend mandatory racial sensitivity training for taking offense at a superior saying that something was "the white Christian thing to do." I guess I may have even hung out with primarily black sailors, but it didn't hit me until one day as I was sitting at a meal someone must have noticed that I happened to be the only white person at my table. The highest-ranking member of the group turned to me with almost a sneer and asked, "Did you join the Navy to study us?" I was so stunned I didn't know what to say other than the obvious, "No." Suddenly I was reminded that no matter what ambivalence I felt about my own racial preference, the people that seemed the most like "home folks" to me were quite sure that I wasn't one of them.

I don't mind admitting that I'm white—why deny the obvious? But every time I look at that question on the form, I feel left out. I think I'll just keep marking "Refuse to Answer" until somebody comes up with a category for my kind of people.

Kent Academy—A Grand Old School

By Katherine Ibitoye
kathal@internetwi.com

"Wow! This is cool," I said as I bounced up and down on the car seat. I glanced at my sister. Her eyes were shining, too, and a hand was tugging at one of her braids as she tried to drink everything in.

It was a sunny day, and I felt great as we drove down the road towards school. There were yellow, blue, and green houses on both sides of the road and different kinds of trees in the yards like mango, orange, and guava. Each house had a flowerbed around it; and I could see red roses, blue morning glories, and purple petunias. Behind us was a large sports track as well as a wooden sign with the school's name: Kent Academy.

"Mmm," I said. "This is like living out in the country. I wonder if there are any horses or cows here." I tried to look out of all the car windows at the same time so as not to miss anything.

"Yeah," my older sister, **Joan**, said excitedly. "And maybe they have rabbits and chickens. Ooh, Kathy, aren't you glad they have a swimming pool?"

"Yep," I replied. "I hope they'll let us go swimming tomorrow."

I had no idea what was in store for me. I had never been away from both my parents for more than a weekend or so. But soon my mom would be dropping us off and leaving my sister and me behind in this strange place. This boarding school would be our new home, and we would have to wait until Christmas to see our family again.

Changes . . . there had been so many changes in my life in the past three months. We had left the U.S. where I had been born to come to Nigeria where my parents were from. Daddy had stayed behind in America to go back to school and get a Master's degree. Since arriving in Nigeria, my mom, brother, two sisters, and I had stayed with all sorts of different relatives in different cities. We kids had had our heads patted and our cheeks pinched. We had been exclaimed over and clucked over in a language that we did not understand. It was especially frustrating when someone said something and others started laughing, and we knew they were laughing at us.

Nigeria was hot and full of mosquitoes. I didn't like the food. I wanted my Frosties—not cold, lumpy porridge. I constantly asked mommy if we could buy hamburgers, but they didn't seem to be as common here as they were in Kansas. Instead we got rice or yam or some other food we were not familiar with. As we ate, our noses would stream and our mouths would be on fire from the mountains of pepper in the food. My sisters, brother, and I wished we could go back to Wichita, to the life we knew and enjoyed.

"Mommy, why do we have to go to school here?" I asked for the umpteenth time.

"Well," she replied," your father and I think it will be easier for the two of you since you both started school in the States. Things in a Nigerian school are a lot different than what you're used to."

Kent Academy was a school for missionary children. A lot of the children and the teachers were from America, but there were also Canadians, British, Australians, and Nigerians.

As we drove up to the dorm area, I stared curiously at the explosion of color in the playground. The kids looked like a busy swarm of ants. They were on the teeter-totters, in the sandbox, on the slide, playing tetherball, running, jumping, yelling, and laughing.

"Everyone seems to be having fun," I told Joan while reaching for the door handle. "Maybe this won't be so bad after all."

"Let's hurry up," she said. She was already eyeing the monkey bars and the swings. I could see she wanted to be with the kids on the playground.

"Here's Kathy's room. Joan is down the hall. We group the children according to their grades." The dorm aunt explained things to us as we made our way to my room.

My room was at the end of the hall, right next to **Aunt Sylvia's** apartment. It had two bunk beds and two dressers. There were bright curtains, bedspreads on each bed, and two rugs to protect our feet from the cold, hard cement floor.

I shuffled my feet on the gray floor. "Why can't Joan and I be in the same room?" I whispered to my mother. I wanted her to be closer, not down the hall. She was my only link to all that was dear.

"Don't worry, Dear. It will be okay. Soon you'll have lots of friends." She gave me a quick hug.

I wanted to stop the clock, to keep my mommy with me. I didn't know if I would like it here. No one else seemed to be new. The other kids appeared to know each other, to be friends.

Soon the explanations were over and it was time for my mom to go.

"Mommy, I don't want to stay," I choked. "I want to go back with you."

I stood by the door of my room, right by the dresser, trying hard not to cry. I felt helpless. Mommy was gone and I didn't know what to do next. A bell rang, but I didn't know what it was for. I could hear girls laughing and talking, but I didn't belong. I wasn't one of them.

"That's the supper bell, Kathy," Aunt Sylvia told me as she patted me gently on the back. "Go get your sister and go on over to the dining room."

I found my sister and slowly, together, we walked outside and towards the dining room.

Snapshots of that first day are still vivid in my memory. However, the fear and sadness did not last. The staff were wonderful, and there were many fun and exciting things to do. Miss Sneath was a great 2nd grade teacher, and the dorm parents were lavish with their hugs and nurturing. Family nights, stocking nights, Sunday walks, swimming, roller skating, reading in the library, dorm contests, sticky buns, the tree house, walking down to the dam, musicals in the chapel, petting bunny rabbits in their cages (and later eating them for Sunday meals), dorm contests, riding in the back of the truck . . . the list goes on and on. My time at KA is without a doubt one of the happiest periods in my life. It's a cherished blessing to have been able to attend such a "grand old school." I sure love it well!

BULLETIN BOARD

BINGHAM ACADEMY

To read a report written for a meeting in September which is an update on the curriculum change at Bingham Academy, go to http://simroots.sim.org/bb.htm.

HILLCREST

Want to see of pictures of Hillcrest up to 1968? Thanks to Baker Hill, you can log on to:
http://community.webshots.com/album/95406266lqaTXO

RVA

2006 marks the 100th anniversary of RVA. Check out www.rva.org/centennial.

SAHEL ACADEMY

Want to connect with your peers? Check out this forum:
http://jrendel.rchomepage.com/forum

Or join the Yahoo e-mail group:
sahelacademyreunion@yahoogroups.com

Looking for classmates or friends from the Class of '78? Visit http://www.africanchop.com/class.htm

WWW

www.cafepress.com/tck
If you want to buy TCK paraphernalia—for him, for her, for baby, and other fun stuff.

www.mkplanet.com is a growing community designed and run by current and adult MKs as an active community providing information, interaction, and support

SIM ARCHIVES

Submitted by Eleanor Iwan (MK Parent, Archive Volunteer)

SIM's Archive is located in the SIM International Office in Tega Cay, SC. There are 2 rooms. One room is used for sorting materials and for research. The larger room is a temperature-controlled (cold) vault which has rolling stacks and shelves (like a library) on which boxes of sorted, cataloged materials are stored. Materials consist of anything related to SIM ministries: historical, administrative, missionary diaries and writings, photos, film, etc.

Who uses the archived material? Researchers, university students, missionaries, missionary relatives, and friends—in short, anyone who needs information on SIM's ministries and missionaries.

The Archives has a director, **Tim Geysbeek (EL, HC, KA 75)** who joined us in August 2005, replacing another missionary who returned to Africa. All of us who sort materials are retired missionaries who volunteer our time. We go through the material removing staples, metal clips, duplicates; label and date; put documents and pictures in acid-free folders; and finally enter data into the computer. We also do some research for people who request specific information. Weekly new materials arrive from the fields throughout the world, so we will never run out of work. *(eiwan@juno.com)*

Dallas 2006 Reunion

Submitted by Dan Elyea (KA, HC 59) fsiyfr@okeechobee.com

Without missing a beat in telling the story, the woman all decked out in African finery reached up to make a slight adjustment to her colorful head wrap. The children that were gathered around her listened with rapt attention, as did the kids (of all ages) sitting further back in the room. In just another minute, the story would be finished. She went on: *They pulled harder. Spider's nice plump waist was being squeezed tighter and tighter. He couldn't breathe. He could feel something swelling under him. Something very, very big. At the same moment, Dontay and Lahdi both gave one last huge jerk on the ropes. Spider's legs buckled under him, and he crumpled to the ground. He couldn't move. "I guess Spider must have gone to the feast," thought Dontay. "I guess Spider must have gone to the dance," thought Lahdi. They both dropped their ropes at the same time. Spider got a breath of air. "Oh, no! I can't go to the festival! Or to the feast!" he mourned. "And what is that huge lump under me?" He looked down. He poked it with one leg. "Oh, no!" he groaned, "It's part of me!" Then he poked it with another leg. "Yes," he said sadly, "It's really me! Now I've got a tiny waist and a big, huge butt!" And that's the way the spider has been ever since.*

Her Liberian folk tale done, the storyteller sent the kids back to their seats, and then she introduced the next skit. Yes—Joyce (Ward) Eden (in her alter ego of Mama Tatabwa) was emceeing Skit Night at the Dallas 2006 Reunion. The skits included several other African stories, a poem, a Nigerian-style soap commercial, a vocal solo, several novelty songs, and a dramatic monolog—by Bathsheba, no less! There was more, including a version of Snow White that featured Seven Vertically Challenged Women. With the aid of his chuffing harmonica, the oldest MK present (class of '59) reminisced about the old Nigerian steam locomotives. The Lion Hunt and Nigerian Airways skits made their cherished obligatory appearances. With a variety of snapping, swishing, and clapping hand movements, everyone participated in recreating the sounds of African rain—coming in from far off, pattering on the roof, building up to a roar of sound, then fading away again into the distance. You could actually smell the cleansed air and the dampened earth. It took us all back, brought us all together, and seemed so right. And that's the way it was for the whole reunion—a time of reminiscing, reconnecting, updating, and networking.

Up to 1969
Front: *Lance Long, Grace Anne (Seger) Swanson, Dan Elyea, Sylvia (Bergman) Eikenberry*
Back: *Jim Eitzen, Bill Bishop*

1970-71
Nancy (Ackley) Ruth, Judy (Thompson) Koci, Amy Strauss, Marjorie (Campion) Key, Dick Ackley

1972-73
Don Campion, Meg (Todd) Ackley, Ruth (Carlson) Gross, Steve Logan, Karen (Seger) Keegan, Linda (Royer) Shankster

1974
Holly Wellborn, Nancy (Hutchins) Libbey, Kevin Reece, Rindi Tipton, Roxanne (Royer) Hill
Missing: *Cathy Miller*

1975
Minna Kayser, Peter Haney, Dan Paternoster

Attendance fluctuated during the day, and from day to day, as some came and went. In round numbers, about a hundred of us were there. By a huge margin, most of the attendees belonged to the period with graduation years falling between 1970 and 1980. The Dallas Marriott Solana hotel provided an excellent venue for our reunion. The organizing committee put together a blend of planned activities and free time that worked out very well to accommodate our varied

personal agendas and inclinations. Besides the fun and fellowship, more than a few experienced blessing and ministry; sometimes giving, sometimes receiving.

This reunion featured an emphasis on MKs with an ELWA background, and they turned out in good numbers. All the usual elements played their part, such as an ice cream social, Nigerian chop, loads of shared photo albums and school annuals and books with an African theme, group sessions, a soccer game in the blazing Texas sun, and endless talking and telling of stories. Some not-so-usual features brought added variety, such as Liberian chop and rides in a private plane.

ELWA MK **Steve Snyder**—a practicing attorney in Greenville, SC—got disconnected, then reconnected, and has a passion to share this with others with similar backgrounds. Steve introduced us to a nifty device: the "retrospectoscope." That's hindsight—in this instance, looking back at your life and seeing a pattern of God's hand at work. Steve led us in several sessions, some quite interactive. Here are a few anecdotes that surfaced in one of these group events.

• *The first time I ever saw a person of color who was not an Ethiopian was when we stayed in a hotel in Kenya on the way home on furlough. I had left something behind in the hotel room. So I got back onto the elevator, and the guy asked me in perfect English what floor I wanted. I told him. And he asked me again, and he asked me a third time. It finally dawned on me that I was speaking to him in Amharic.*

• *We'd stopped in England on the way home on furlough one time. We rented a van and went down to see my grandpa. There was a crew working beside the road. My dad leaned out the window and yelled, "Sannu da aiki!" to them. (That's a Hausa greeting appropriate to someone who is in the process of working.)*

• *When I was in the tenth grade we came back to the States. I was in a Christian school. There were two black people in the whole school. The first day of school I sat by them for the opening exercises, and I said to one of them, "Man, I've never seen so many white people in one place before!"*

• *My parents were in language school in the early 30s. One of the Nigerian couples was getting married. My dad told them about the American custom of throwing rice after a wedding ceremony. So the wedding day came along. As it so happened, one of the missionary ladies had recently thrown out a girdle. A Nigerian man came in to the wedding, wearing the girdle on his head. The missionaries found it most difficult to maintain their composure. The wedding went on, and the bride and groom began walking out. The Nigerians started throwing rice—cooked rice!*

• *I'm too proud to admit I don't know everything in the world. In a church while on furlough, we were asked if we could say a Bible verse in "African." My brother said, "No." And I said, "Oh, I can say a verse in Arabic." I didn't know one, so I said (in Arabic), "I hate being here, and I wish I could be home right now." And I kind of got in trouble because my brothers told.*

• *On furlough, my mom used to dress my sister and me up in our native clothing. Then she would put cocoa in cold cream on us, so we would become the native children of the day, and she would parade us out on the platform. And that's how I got my beautiful skin!*

An auction, with the proceeds going to the **Steve Beacham Memorial Gym** at Hillcrest, closed out the 2006 Reunion. Ever the versatile one, Mama Tatabwa did a

1976
Front: *Connie (Miller) Haney, Phil Miller, Joyce (Ward) Eden, Birdie (Hall) Miller, Andy Tausig*
Back: *Paul Paternoster, Vicki (Stuart) Cole, Mari (Haney) Bendorfeanu*

1977-78
Front: *Sylvia (Royer) Taussig, David Frazee, Steve Ackley*
Back: *Steve Snyder, Kate (High) Dunson, Steve Miller, Carol (Mills) Shanks, Julie (Bowers) Lassiter, Charles Lock, Betsie (Campion) Smith, Debb Forster*

1979
Michelle Clark, Paige (Reece) McCormick, Joy (Hill) Hebert

1980s
Stephanie (Robinson) Wyman, Margaret Jean (Yarbrough) Jacobus, Linda (Legg) Roszhart

ELWA
Back: *Steve Ackley, Dick Ackley, Judy (Thompson) Koci, John Schindler, David Frazee, Steve Snyder, Dan Snyder, Michelle Clark*
Middle: *Connie (Miller) Haney, Nancy (Ackley) Ruth, "Uncle Pete" Ackley, Karen (Ackley) Kern, Jodi (Bruning) Schmitt, Suzanne Salter, Martha Nash, Carol (Galley) Brines, Sam Kayea*
Front: *Jamie Leuders, Robin (Miller) Zook, Cindy (Buck) Bradley, Becca (Buck) Holcomb, Sara (Buck) Graham*

first-rate job as auctioneer. The several items on the block—with significance to the Reunion or with an African connection—produced enthusiastic bidding, raising hundreds of dollars for the project.

Our hearty appreciation goes to the Dallas 2006 Reunion organizing committee—**Steve Ackley, Holly (Strauss) Plank,** and **Nancy (Ackley) Ruth**—for a great job of preparation and execution. Some others gave a lot of assistance during the reunion, including all of Steve Ackley's family, **Amy Strauss, Sylvia (Bergman) Eikenberry,** and **Joyce (Ward) Eden**.

ELWA Reunion Reflections

Submitted by Jodi (Bruning) Schmitt (EL 79)
djschmit@cebridge.net

Some of us had never met. Others were known as the "bigga biggas" and did not associate with the "small pikins." There were those who didn't remember much and thought they would not fit in. But we all had one thing in common: the place—ELWA—Monrovia, Liberia.

July, 2006. Dallas, Texas. The KA/HC /ELWA reunion. The ELWA community was recreated with 21 MKs. As we laughed, cried, talked, and hugged, a safe place to share and process through memories was born. And did we ever process those memories—way into the night! We visited a local Liberian church where **John Schindler** preached, and we actively participated in the receiving of the offering as each one of us took our turn to go up front and deposit our offering in the plate. **Karen (Ackley) Kern** prepared a delicious feast of palm butter and greens. I can still taste it! All were inspired to sing a cappella as we shared songs from ELWA chapel and YFC. The harmonies from **David Frazee** and **Dan Snyder** made us all feel at home.

It was fascinating to hear where the Lord had taken each one of us. **Steve Snyder** encouraged us in our "MK-ness" and **Judy (Thompson) Koci** challenged us with the question, "What is your passion that has driven you from the past to the present?" As we look to the future, put July, 2008, Atlanta, Georgia, on your calendar! You don't want to miss it!

Submitted by Nancy (Ackley) Ruth (BA, EL, HC 70)
nancyjaruth2003@yahoo.com

For the first time, a reunion was held for anyone who spent any amount of time "growing up" at ELWA. "There are no adults here!" was an underlying theme to the wonderful days we spent together in Dallas in July.

We spent the first afternoon looking often at each other's nametags as we got to know each other's grownup faces. But soon we fell into lively banter—sharing memories, telling stories, laughing and lapsing into Liberian English—and it never stopped. All through Sunday and Monday and into the wee hours of Tuesday morning, we continued bonding—sometimes acting silly, sometimes sharing from our hearts, but always relishing the opportunity to connect face to face with brothers and sisters who share that enigmatic ELWA heritage.

Deep appreciation is extended to the Hillcrest Reunion team who so graciously and generously invited, included, and blessed us with this opportunity.

Another ELWA Kids reunion is being planned for **July 3-6, 2008** in Atlanta, GA. A facility has been found and plans are well underway. **We invite ICA alumni to join us!** Watch for details in future issues of *Simroots*.

Anyone who spent any amount of time growing up at ELWA is invited and strongly encouraged to join the ELWAKids YahooGroup. Send an e-mail to Karen or Nancy (Ackley) at *elwakid@yahoo.com* or *nancyjaruth2003@yahoo.com* and request an invitation.

Business Meetings

You may log on to http://simroots.sim.org for KA and Hillcrest business meeting minutes.

FUTURE REUNIONS

Watch for details in the next *Simroots*, on the *Simroots* Web site, or through Yahoo groups.

BINGHAM ACADEMY
Date: July 5-8, 2007
Place: Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, Michigan

ELWA
Date: July 3-6, 2008
Place: Atlanta, Georgia

KA/Hillcrest
Date: July 3-5, 2009
Place: Chicago area

Chicago Parent/Staff Tea and Reconnect

On Saturday, April 22, 2006, the SIM AMK Advisory Committee hosted a tea in the fellowship hall of Lombard Christian Reformed Church in Lombard, IL, to honor SIM's parents, teachers, and caregivers. Following this special event where 34 were in attendance, a group of MKs from the area gathered in the afternoon for a mini-reunion.

A week later, a group of MKs and SIMers met in Zeeland, Michigan, for a tea hosted by David and **Clara (Grant) Brower (GH, KA, HC 58)** in their lovely home, converted from a one-room schoolhouse. They invite all MKs to visit or stay with them. Ph: (616) 688-7356

Chicago MKs
1 *Minna Kayser,* ***2*** *Mari (Haney) Bendorfeanu,* ***3*** *Naomi Knox,* ***4*** *Grace Porter,* ***5*** *Marcia (Steely) Parrotte,*
6 *Becky Bauman,* ***7*** *Nancy (Thompson) Molenhouse,* ***8*** *Karen (Seger) Keegan,*
9 *Chris (Bliss) Himsel,* ***10*** *Ruth (Frame) Van Reken,* ***11*** *Beaj (Lacey) Beacham,* ***12*** *Tim Kraakevik,* ***13*** *Nancy (Ackley) Ruth,*
14 *Suzanne Slater,* ***15*** *Katherine (Ibitoye) Riebe,* ***16*** *Tom Kraakevik,* ***17*** *Dave Harling,* ***18*** *Norm Kapp,* ***19*** *Dave Porter,*
20 *John Rhine,* ***21*** *Marjorie (Frame) Lewis,* ***22*** *Judy (Thompson) Koci,* ***23*** *Bob Schindler,* ***24*** *Steve Snyder,*
25 *John Schindler,* ***26*** *?,*
Not in photo: *Jim Gould, John Modricker, Joanna Hatton*

Lois Balzer

Paul Craig received a standing ovation.

Zeeland, Michigan Reconnect
Back: *Bob Swingle, Chuck Miller, David Brower*
Middle: *Carol (Pullen) Sterken, Julie & Jim Wayner*
Front: *Karen (Seger) Keegan, Clara (Grant) Brower, Anita (Pullen) Swingle, Joy (VanderSchie) Miller*

Eileen Bauman

Virginia Patterson

Sahel Academy Reunion

We need people to join in on the discussion to plan all the details of when and where.
See our Web site at: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SahelAcademyReunion/
To join the group, write to: ***SahelAcademyReunion-subscribe@yahoogroups.com***
When applying, please state the years you were at Sahel or your association to the school.
Lisa Germaine ***(dkgmkrus@preferred.com)***

Gowans Home Remembered

By Esther (Collins) McGibbon (GH 1936-1948)

When I was a young child, circumstances were very different from what they are now in the missionary world. During my growing up years, SIM MKs stayed with their parents on the mission field for only a brief time, then were left in the homeland while their parents went back to the foreign country. There were many reasons, at the time, for leaving children behind. I nearly died when I contracted malaria as a very young child. Many other tropical diseases were prevalent: black water fever, yellow fever, sleeping sickness, and many more. So health reasons were very compelling. There were no schools or academies at the time in that part of the world, so for reasons of education and culture it was thought best to have children remain at home.

My eldest sister, **Betty**, was only three years old when my mother and father left her at the Gowans Home for MKs in Collingwood, Ontario, Canada—a home founded by Dr. R.V. Bingham, who also helped found the Sudan Interior Mission under which my parents worked in Nigeria. I think it was much harder on the parents than on the children, this separation.

I was two years old when I went to the Gowans Home, and I had my two older sisters, Betty and **Ruth**, with me. But our stay in Collingwood was short because my parents were unable, in those depression years, to raise the funds to return to their work in Nigeria. So we spent the next three years with Mother and Daddy in New York State where my father was a pastor in Northfield.

Then at the age of five I returned, with my sisters, to the Gowans Home. And I remained there until I was eighteen years old and in Grade 13. During that time I stayed only one year with my parents (when they were on furlough), the year I was eleven years old.

There were between forty-five and fifty children at that time at the Gowans Home, ranging in age from very young children (even a baby from time to time) to high schoolers. The Home, when we first arrived, was run by **Miss Linda Kaercher,** a nurse, who was a woman of character and culture. There were various helpers—one to look after the younger girls, who included my sisters and me. Then there was a staff of cooks, a woman to do the washing, another to do ironing, and a general handyman. These latter did not live with us but came in from the town.

We were fortunate in that the high school girls were tenderhearted and took an interest in us. Miss Kaercher often took the very tiniest children into her bedroom and gave them special care.

Miss Kaercher

We missionary kids who lived at the Gowans Home went out to the town schools for our education. Most of the teachers we had were excellent. One of them, our science teacher Margaret Gilmore, wrote that she had a "respectful memory of all" her Gowans Home pupils. She went on to say, "The latter is, in large measure, the result of the good homes from which you came and the healthy guidance given by Miss Kaercher. It is significant that, as far as I ever knew, there was not one 'bad apple in the barrel.' Journalists of this decade (the 1970s) are lauding rebellion in the young as if it were a virtue. I see it as a sorry situation arising from immaturity made more immature than normal; youth denied discipline to bring about cooperation between the generations. In Gowans Home you did learn to cooperate with one another and with the adults in your lives."

Our spiritual life was nurtured in many ways. Every evening after supper we were expected to repeat a new Bible verse which we had learned during the day. In this way we memorized many passages of Scripture—which most of us still can bring to memory.

Each Sunday morning, after breakfast and before our walk to church, we held our own little Gowans Home service, with the kids leading the singing, the prayers, the Bible reading, and often also the short devotional. In addition, we attended Sunday School on Sunday afternoon. In the summer there was Daily Vacation Bible School and a wonderful Christian camp to which we went for several years.

Occasionally the church we attended had a visiting evangelist, and special evangelistic services were held. I was eight years old when Mr. Nygren came to Collingwood and preached compellingly to us children as well as to the adults. It was then that I truly understood my need of the Saviour and asked God's forgiveness.

In high school we belonged to an Inter-School Christian Fellowship group that met once a week at school and also had social outings. **Mrs. Helen Thompson**, who lived at the Gowans Home and looked after us girls, was our faithful ISCF sponsor.

The highlight of our year came in the summer when we went by bus to Muskoka, to Canadian Keswick Girls' Camp. The Canadian Keswick Conference and the Girls' and Boys' Camps had been another of Dr. Bingham's projects. I can remember standing on the veranda at the Gowans Home, surrounded by bundles of bedding (no sleeping bags in those days!), waiting oh-so-impatiently for the bus. At Camp we learned to swim and boat and to explore the natural world. But I think the most important thing Camp did for us girls was to provide us with wonderful counselors and instructors and a superlative camp director in **Mrs. Mildred Chenault**, who later went as an SIM missionary to Ethiopia.

Each Sunday during the year we wrote a letter to our parents and told them of the week's happenings. The children who were too young to write letters had their messages recorded for them. Our parents regularly replied to our letters. They told us of their life, their work, the land with its interesting flora and fauna, the people of their adopted country. I still have the letters written to me by my mother before she died at the age of thirty-nine, when I was six years old. She is buried in Nigeria.

A contemporary at the Gowans Home, **Gerald Hunt**, in a letter to us about our days at the Home wrote: "How most of us were shunted around and moved after those golden days together, seldom to see one another again." And he ends, "In some ways missionaries' kids have a rough time, but there are many compensations."

That's the way I feel too. One of the reasons we think of them as "golden days" is because of the closeness and camaraderie we children felt to each other—and still do. I have kept in touch with several of the girls who were at the Home with me, and they are family, almost as much as my sisters Betty and Ruth.

And do I feel bitterness that I was not with my parents during my growing up years? A very few of the children I grew up with feel their lives were blighted, but the vast majority of us really feel it was a privilege to have parents who gave their all in the Lord's service.

Many of my contemporaries at the Gowans Home for Missionaries' Children followed in the footsteps of their parents and became missionaries in their turn (my sister Betty among them). I can easily think of twenty or thirty or more whom I knew at the Home who are now serving, or who formerly served, as missionaries.

Even as a child I understood that my parents were doing what was all-important to them and what was advancing God's kingdom. We knew they had left us at home for all the right reasons.

Christmas Was in the Air…

By Cherry (Long) Sabathne
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Decorations appeared on the walls of the dorms and dining hall. They were creative decorations made out of crepe paper and cardboard. The kitchen staff made a colorful gingerbread house each year and displayed it in the lounge of the dining hall with a sign that said, "Do not touch."

Practice began for the school's Christmas program. In art class we made props for the Christmas play. One year we made great snowballs! We hollowed out orange halves, glued the skins together, and covered them with cotton. The night of the program, we skipped into the auditorium to the sound of "Sleigh Ride" in the background. We surrounded the audience, and at various points in the music, we threw the snowballs at them.

We also made special presents for our parents in art class. The most memorable one was a candle we made in third grade. **Miss Brown** melted paraffin and whipped it with an eggbeater until it was fluffy. Then we frosted the paraffin around a taper candle until it was the size we wanted. Before the paraffin cooled, we sprinkled it with colored sparkles. We wrapped our candles in empty vegetable cans to carry them home.

Stocking Night at the boarding school was the biggest excitement! The staff hung enough stockings for every child. When we lived in the wing of the dorm across from the lounge, the night before, we stood at the windows in the dark trying to see what the staff put into the stockings. The anticipated night arrived, and every child had something special. Can you imagine 240 kids in one room diving into their stockings?

Going home for the holiday was the highlight! We had been away from Galmi (Niger) for three months by that time. Because our station was one of the farthest away, we were invariably nearly the last to leave. One of the compensations was that we got to eat the gingerbread house and decorate Christmas cookies.

Getting up at 5:30 in the morning, eating a special breakfast in the dining hall, and riding to the airport in the back of a lorry was the start of the exciting day. It usually took the whole day to travel home by the time we cleared customs, landed at the nearest airport, and drove the rest of the way. That distance varied from 125 miles to 12 miles by the time I was in high school. I remember trips that took us through lightning storms, others with airsick companions, and one with an especially rough landing. When we got out of the airplane, we found a length of telephone wire wrapped around the front wheel of the plane. In second grade, I even got to sit on the pilot's lap and navigate the airplane!

We arrived home to ornaments strung across the windows and doorways, stockings hung across the fireplace, and a small flat metal Christmas tree propped up on a card table covered with cotton. There wasn't a lot of room for decorations, even if we'd had them, with six kids and two adults in a two-bedroom house. Every night we rolled beds out to the living room and the dining room, and the small bedroom held a bunk bed, another rollaway, and a large crib. This was not unusual to us; it just looked like home!

Every year, Christmas morning arrived with the African women singing Christmas carols in Hausa outside our bedroom windows at 5:30. That did it for us kids! We jumped out of bed and hounded Mom and Dad until they got up too. The first thing Dad did was light a fire in the fireplace. We were so glad he had built a fireplace in the house! Early mornings in the desert were cold!

In the marketplace, we had bought gifts for each other, and we gathered around the fireplace to exchange them. Then, like it or not, we all went to morning prayers with the other missionaries. When we returned, we had breakfast in the living room in front of the fireplace.

After breakfast we prepared for the Christmas pageant at the church where my brothers joined the shepherds, and we girls appeared with the host of angels. The pageant always began in the Garden of Eden, and the tempting fruit was a grapefruit. We managed to have some because it came down from Nigeria on the plane with us. When the service ended, it was nearly 90 degrees, Dad (a medical doctor) had to go to the hospital, and Christmas melted into a regular day.

All too soon our holiday was over, and all we could hope for was that the harmattan would delay our flight back to school. Harmattan is dust blowing off the desert, blanketing the air. When it was thick, the planes couldn't fly and our return to school was delayed. Sometimes we were lucky, but not always!

Still, we had been home for Christmas! And, even if it were in a desert far from civilization, it was the best place to be for the Christmas holiday!

To Dance in the Rain—Memories of Liberia

By Amy (Coutts) Medina (EL, RV 94)
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I keep a rock in the bottom of my jewelry box. It's just an ordinary rock to most—it's long and fat and fits perfectly in my hand when I wrap my fingers around it. It's been rubbed smooth by the sand in the ocean, but it's not particularly pretty, so I don't display it for fear someone might think it's useless and throw it away. But I know it's there. And this rock is one of my most important possessions, for it represents something in my life extremely dear to me.

I found this rock on the shores of West Africa where I grew up. I had often picked up rocks in the clear blue waters of the ocean near my home because they sparkled in the sun shining through the water. When they soon dried off and weren't so pretty anymore, I got rid of them, but for some reason, this one I kept. One day the rock fell off my window sill, and a piece broke off.

When I was twelve, on the last day I was in West Africa, I took that piece of the rock and hid it in a corner of our house. I took the large portion with me back to California. I was only going to be in the States for a year, I thought; and when I went back to Africa, I would unite the two pieces of the rock, and my heart would be home again—where it belonged.

Home . . . for a long, long time I considered my home to be Liberia, a small country on the coast of West Africa. I was six when my family first moved there as missionaries, so I don't remember much before that time. To me,

Liberia was a beautiful place, a wonderful place, a perfect place for a child to grow up. I remember it as a place full of trees to climb, flowers to collect, and rain to dance in. Completely cut off from almost any American influences such as television or Toys "Я" Us, I instead grew up with children from all over the world in the absolute freedom of the outdoors. I saw everything and anything as a treasure box for my imagination, waiting to be opened and explored.

Saturdays in Liberia were my favorite days of all. People in Liberia knew how important it was not to work on Saturdays, so almost all of the 100 or so families that lived on the Mission compound went to the beach. Our house was only a few hundred feet from the ocean, so Mom usually let my brother Paul and me run down ahead of her. The water was always warm and clear, and oh, so beautifully blue. My friends and I pretended we were shipwrecked or mermaids or beautiful princesses in a castle by the sea. Sometimes we built intricate series of tunnels in the sand or examined the millions of baby crabs that had just hatched on the rocks. On low tide days, the water was so shallow that we could walk all the way out to the reef and not even get our knees wet. Then Dad brought buckets, and Paul and I pulled live shells off the rocks. Dad then boiled them to get the animal out, and the house stank all day, but we would have beautiful shells as a result. One Saturday every July the Portuguese-man-of-war jellyfish washed up on the shore. Whenever that happened, we kids went down to the beach and discovered the sand littered with blue and purple bubbles. But those "bubbles" had long, invisible tentacles that could kill a person, so we couldn't go swimming that day. Undaunted, we ran home and put our shoes on, then walked along the beach and popped the jellyfish with sticks. Saturdays were made for fun, I thought, and any problem of the week could be solved by a Saturday at the beach.

Saturdays were great, but I liked school too. School always started early in the morning, at 7:00, and ended at 1:00, because the afternoons were too hot and humid to have classes in the suffocating tropical heat. My friend Mindy and I always walked the half mile to school together, usually taking the shortcut through the jungle unless it had been flooded. On rainy days it rained so hard in Liberia that it was no use trying to stay dry. We just took off our thongs so that the mud wouldn't flip up on our dresses, and then we walked to school in the rain, barefoot. We were soaking wet by the time we got there, but the air was so warm that we would dry quickly. A few times my teacher even had to cancel class on rainy days because the rain poured so hard on the tin roof that we couldn't hear her talk. Even if we could hear her, she always had to stop talking when the thunder sounded because it was so loud. My heart always beat a little faster during thunderstorms; they were so exhilarating. My classmates and I whispered and giggled. "God's bowling," we said. "He just got a strike." Thus, school was often unpredictable, but always exciting.

Mindy and I often took a long time walking home from school if it wasn't raining. Sometimes the sun shone so brilliantly on the ocean that it sparkled like millions of turquoise jewels. Mindy and I picked flowers and put them in our hair, or we pulled handfuls of the tiny ones and threw them gleefully into the air until the whole road was covered with tiny flowers. Sometimes we stopped and talked to the Liberian children who traveled from house to house, selling fruit from large pans balanced on their heads. Life was relaxed, but never monotonous. I rarely had appointments or places I had to be, but I was never bored. I just waited for the next adventure to come along—because it always did.

I always had the afternoons free to play. Mindy, our brothers, and I thought up all sorts of things to do together. Someone had a canoe, and the four of us often piled in and took a tour of the lush tropical swamp right next to my house. We paddled in amongst the lily pads and the water beetles skimming across the surface, and sometimes we all carefully climbed out and scrambled up the mangrove trees growing in the middle of the water. "Don't fall in," our mothers said, "or you'll get leeches on you." But we didn't care about the leeches. We were just afraid of the crocodile that all the kids said lived in the swamp. There was never a lack of material for our imaginations.

Sometimes I went over to my friend Esther's house after school. Esther was Liberian, and Liberian girls are expected to do all sorts of chores like washing clothes and making dinner. I would wait for her to finish, and then we played together. We followed little streams through the jungle just to see where they went, and we picked mangos and ate them right off the trees. Esther sometimes braided my hair the Liberian way or showed me how she made peanut butter or fried plantain chips from scratch. Sometimes I forgot that I was supposed to be an American girl—and rarely did I think about the fact that very few of my friends had ever stepped foot on American soil. The similarities of childhood often overlook the differences of culture.

In the late afternoons, Dad came home from the hospital where he worked. He picked up Paul and me on his motorcycle, and we would drive to the administration building to pick up our mail. He would take us to a special patch of beach that was his favorite, and we picked up shells and watched the sun set over the glorious Atlantic Ocean. It was peaceful and secure and wonderfully beautiful. I was given a utopian picture of life—that whatever problems life held could be solved by sitting on the hammock on the front porch and watching the lightning hit the ocean, or a spontaneous water balloon fight with friends, or singing joyfully in church with people from all over the world.

Liberia was my home for a long time. So when we packed up everything to come to California for a year, and I left that piece of a rock behind, I was leaving part of my heart behind.

We never went back.

In 1990, when we were in the States, a civil war started in Liberia. For nine months we waited, hoping the fighting would stop and we could go back. But it never ended. All the remaining missionaries were evacuated. The mission compound was bombed by rebel forces, and we received sketchy reports on the location of Liberian friends. Newspapers gave us headlines like "an orgy of killing and mutilation." And all the while, I was thinking, "That's my home—that's my home they're destroying." With it, a part of me was destroyed too. That summer when the war started was the summer I grew up and was faced with reality—the reality of hate, and killing, and evil. My view of the world had been hopeful—that people from all different countries could get along, that life could be simple, that a hard day's work could earn reward. I had seen poverty and sickness, but I had also seen miracles and sunshine and hope. But when Liberia was destroyed, so was my dream that life could be perfect—or at least could be made better.

Thus, a piece of me was left behind in Liberia, a piece of my childhood, and of the childlike faith that the world isn't so bad after all. The two pieces of my rock will never be put back together. But I will never forget the beautiful dream that once was my life.

This Old House—Tornaveen / Gowans Home

Presented by Ruth (Jensen) Whitehead
at the last Gowans Home reunion
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This reunion isn't about a house. But there was a house . . . .

This beautiful old Victorian house is located on the southwest corner of Third and Oak Streets in Collingwood. The twenty-six-room mansion, much turreted and gabled, and the lovely lawns surrounding it originally took up the area from Oak to Cedar Streets on Third Street.

The mansion was originally named Tornaveen by Frank Telfer, president of Telfer Biscuit Company, who built the house in 1893 for a reputedly shocking $6,000. Frank Telfer's brother, Herbert, had built his house, Armadale, across Third Street, on the northwest corner of Third and Oak Streets, and it was whispered that Frank was trying to outdo Herbert in the elegance of his house.

Frank Telfer built his house in two distinct parts, divided by a double brick wall. The gracious verandah facing Oak Street is the entrance to the home of Frank Telfer and his family. The smaller entrance on Third Street was for the part of the house built specifically for his mother.

One hundred and twelve years later, the house is still the epitome of elegance. The entrance paneling and stairways on both sides of the house are still breathtaking. The windows, some with stained glass, others with cut glass are timeless. The rooms are majestic in size with twelve-foot-high ceilings. One of the most significant features of the house is the turreted tower with the two interior tower rooms. A gymnasium was added by the Whiteheads who were in charge for twenty years during the time the mansion was Gowans Home for Missionaries' Children.

Collingwood knows about the Telfer years. Some time after the close of the First World War, the Telfer Biscuit Company was no longer a viable concern. After the demise of the company, the house was sold in 1925 to the Sudan Interior Mission with several hundred missionaries working in Africa. The house was renamed Gowans Home after Walter Gowans who lost his life to malaria in Nigeria alone at the age of twenty-five as he and two other men started what would become one of the greatest missions in the modern world.

Gowans Home

After being used as a home for missionaries' children, the house stood empty from about 1965 until 1974 when it was purchased by Gerald and Carol Cockerill who lived there with their three children for about ten years. Interestingly enough, Gerald Cockerill installed his mother in the spacious part of the house that had originally been used by Frank Telfer for his mother. During the Cockerill years the house was a showplace and was featured in the 1981 Christmas edition of *Decoramag*, a Canadian magazine. There is something about this old house that draws people back. Becky (Cockerill) Volvo, who once lived in the house with her parents, now works there three days a week at the Ski Academy.

Many people in Collingwood are unaware of the Gowans Home years. Because sickness was so rife in Africa with few remedies, missionary parents usually kept their children with them for several years, then sent them home for their education while the parents continued their work in Africa. Missionaries came home every four years and spent a year at home with their children before returning to Africa. Most of the children were Canadians and Americans, although some were from England and Australia. Children were there whose parents were serving in Africa, India, and South America; and the father of one family ministered to the Eskimos in the Canadian Yukon.

This lovely mansion became a home away from home for hundreds of children whose parents were missionaries. Those of us who lived at Gowans Home remember Collingwood with love and Gowans Home with a special sense of belonging. Why else would we come back to Collingwood from all over Canada and the United States for reunions—usually held at Blue Mountain Resort—and traipse through the house again and again? The house is now owned by the National Ski Academy of Canada. They are always wonderful about letting eighty to one hundred people go through the house, remembering and laughing at memories. They are also used to people knocking on the door and saying, "I used to live here." When my husband (who was also an MK and lived at Gowans Home) and I took our family to see the house, the person who answered the door said, "We would love to have you come in, but I'm sorry, we don't have anyone to show you around just now." I replied, "It's O.K. I know my way!"

REMEMBER WHEN

We grew up in an elegant part of town. Our twenty-six-room mansion was on one corner. Armadale across Third Street was owned at that time by the President of the Collingwood Shipyards, John Leitch. It had been the site of a gala reception for the Governor General of Canada in June, 1918. The southeast corner had a beautiful home with marble pillars owned by Dr. McFaul and the elegant Elmwood Dundurn Hall owned by Julian Ferguson (former Mayor of Collingwood and, in our era, a Member of Parliament). Other gracious homes lined wide, tree-laden Third Street.

The house was huge. During Gowans Home days, the part of the house built for Frank Telfer's mother was the girls' part of the house. Later the house at 216 Cedar Street was purchased for the girls. When the house on Cedar Street was no longer large enough, it was sold and became a Bed and Breakfast called The Cedar Chest, and the lovely old Armadale on the northwest corner of Third and Oak was purchased. It is now owned by Fritz and Terry Schuller who have restored it beautifully and have graciously allowed many of our group to go through their home as they remember their times at Gowans Home.

A home with between thirty and fifty children took some staffing. From Collingwood we hired a gardener, cooks, and laundresses. Other people with connections to the Mission came and went. **Linda M. Kaercher**, a nurse, was in charge for years, followed by **Stan and Rae Whitehead**, who were there for almost twenty years. Most of the time we had a nurse, handyman, several cooks, and a housemother for the girls. The housemother for the girls for years was **Helen Thompson** whose son, **Jim Thompson**, grew up at Gowans Home and became the head of the Canadian Olympic Association.

All who lived there were expected to help keep the place neat and clean. Once you reached ten years old, you were assigned one meal after which you helped with the dishes and set the tables for the next meal. Everyone had one daily task, like dusting a room, and a Saturday task that would take a little longer. Those who wanted to make some money were often offered a job in the house during the summer or Easter vacation.

The grounds were breathtakingly beautiful. In the spring the bridal wreath hedge bloomed at the same time as the pink hawthorn tree and all the pink petunias. I can still tell you the name of every tree and where it stood. When Whiteheads came and most of the kids were teenagers, the garden area was turned into a paved tennis court that doubled as a skating rink in winter. We all helped shovel the snow and water the rink down. Much later a gymnasium was built onto the back of the property. The lawn area beside the old garden had been a restful play area with apple and cherry trees, morning glories, and sweet peas in abundance. In later years it was turned into a ball field with Gowans Homers and neighboring kids playing riotous games of ball.

In winter, the high swings on the playground were taken down; and **Mr. Sherrick**, who lived on the corner of Fourth and Oak and was the gardener for years, built a twelve-foot-high slide. Steps were attached, and the children dragged their sleds up, then slid down on the iced slide, often coasting out to Third Street and down the street.

Christmas time was very special. We all helped decorate the tree that went right up to the twelve-foot ceiling. On Christmas Eve, every child put a stocking on the hearth for Santa to fill. It was a breathtaking sight on Christmas morning to see thirty or forty stockings filled and the tree loaded with presents. Because our parents were not there didn't mean that we didn't have relatives and friends of our parents who gave us gifts. Stockings were opened immediately, but one of my memories is having to wait for the King and later the Queen to speak on the radio before we could open our gifts.

All of the children went to schools in town—King George School first, then Collingwood Collegiate where many of us were class presidents and on various athletic teams. Friends were always welcome. *One boy who lived two houses down the street on Oak Street was at Gowans Home so much that he is invited to our reunions to this day and still lives in the area. We laughingly said that if you had your own napkin ring and bed you must be a Gowans Homer, as we were called in town. *[*Vern Thompson passed away August 5, 2006.]*

Today those children who grew up in Collingwood and lived at Gowans Home are doctors, teachers, nurses, electronic engineers, missionaries, and pastors and are scattered all over the globe. Our numbers are dwindling, but we have returned to Collingwood once again this first weekend in October to enjoy once more the town of Collingwood, revisit the Blue Mountain, walk down Hurontario Street, sit by Georgian Bay for a while, and drive into the beautiful countryside, but most of all to renew acquaintances with friends who were like brothers and sisters to us.

I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself. Psalm 89:1, 2

FROM THE ICA ARCHIVES

Senior Class Trip outside American Embassy in Abidjan, 1977
Submitted by Heidi (Zobrist) Guzman

Interview with Paul and Gerry Craig (KA Staff)

On September 30 of 2005, Norman Kapp (GH, KA 59) interviewed "Uncle" Paul and "Aunt" Gerry Craig, founders of KA, for the March 2006 observance of KA's 60th anniversary. Here are some excerpts, transcribed by Grace Anne (Seger) Swanson from the video of the interview.

Norm: Let's start by learning a bit about you folks before we talk about the early days of Kent Academy. Tell us what you've been doing since you left KA.

Paul: We left KA in 1963 and came to the States, and I realized that I didn't have the education that I needed. I wanted to complete a Master's degree in case I would go back to Nigeria. So I went to Case University in Cleveland, Ohio, and then after that I taught about three years, and following that I got into other work. Then I felt that there was a great need in my life to make a move back to spiritual things. And I just prayed that God would move me back into full-time service. Well, that was when I got a call from Warren Wiersbe here in Chicago. He asked if I would be willing to come and interview, and they accepted me as a business manager. I was there at Moody Church for about seven and a half years until Irwin Lutzer came in 1980. Then I became visitation pastor for the Church until I retired.

Norm: When did you first get the idea for a boarding school for SIM MKs?

Paul: Well, I think it was being a left-behind kid. I went to Gowans Home in Collingwood, Ontario, where there was a home for missionary kids. Some of the MKs liked it and some didn't do too well. Just as I was finishing college, the real need came that missionary children coming to America needed to have a solid base. I always felt they could get a solid base if they could at least gain education in Nigeria before coming to America. And in my last year in college I was thinking about going into some kind of work that would take me into work with children, but my mother sent me a letter and said, "Paul, why don't you think about coming to Africa?" and that set the stage for feeling that I needed to go to Africa and begin a school or open a school for missionaries' children and that's about it.

Paul Craig at Gowans Home approx. 5 years old

Karen (Craig) Johnson's daughter's wedding
Back: *David Lagerfeldt, Kandy Craig, Nancy Lagerfeldt, Jim Craig, Karen (Craig) Johnson, Philip Johnson, Terry Johnson*
Front: *Paul & Gerry Craig, Christopher & Elizabeth Cogbill, Marcella Johnson, Kristin Johnson*
The bride & groom are in 4th and 3rd year Med School at Medical College of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Paul & Gerry moved to Beacon Hill Retirement Community in March, 2004.

Gerry: When I had my health degrade, and I went down to DuBose Academy [in Florida], an SIM girl told me that her parents loved the African children more than they loved her. And it just cut me to pieces. That was when my desire for working with missionaries' children was born.

Norm: Was the SIM thinking they needed a school at that time? And if so, why?

Paul: There were many children on the mission field that hadn't gone to school and they were school age. . . .

Gerry: Paul had come up from Patigi where he had been stationed for eleven months, and he was on holiday, and these parents and their children, who were not in school, were there at holiday time. One Sunday he gathered up the kids—who were very restless—and took them out for a walk. When he came back, he found their parents—that would be the **Coxes**, the **Davises**, the **Heiberts**, perhaps the **Hurshes** and the **Johns**—and they were all in a little knot talking about how much they needed a school. When Paul heard them, he told them that he had really been interested in doing that very thing.

Norm: How was the Mission able to help in the beginning of the school?

Paul: They began by making a decision that only the field council could make. They made that decision, and then the rest was up to us as to what we were we going to do.

Norm: I remember reading in one of the reports they said. "We don't have any money; we don't have any builder. But we can pray."

Gerry: That's exactly it. They could not really help very much. They did a lot of praying.

Norm: What skills did Paul have to learn in those early days?

Paul: I really didn't have that many skills. But I had a couple of things in my mind. I liked building, and I desired to do the best that I could by asking people who knew—who built—just what was the next step. You get the bricks made. You get masons and people that knew how to

build and how to work from plans. But knowing how to make plans was something that I could do—tracing paper, making plans, and then finally taking those plans into Jos for the blueprints.

Norm: Where was Gerry when Paul was beginning to build?

Gerry: I was in America finishing a Master's degree. When I finished that, I came to the mission field in March '46. I went to Minna to learn Hausa, and then I went up to Miango where Paul was working on the first two buildings, and we were married October 29.

Norm: How did you choose the name Kent Academy?

Gerry: Because already we had Bingham Academy in Ethiopia and Gowans Home in Collingwood, but the third founder of our mission, Kent, was not represented. So we named it for him.

Norm: What preparations did you need to make to equip the kitchen, classrooms, and dorms?

Paul: Well, I think that from my loads that I had brought out we had kitchen material, but maybe not enough. We could purchase what we needed in Jos. But there was a need for chairs and benches and school tables and beds of course. We had wooden bunk beds in those early days. And carpenters on the premises made these chairs and tables, etc.

Gerry: And then the windows needed curtains, of course, and the tables needed cloths, and we needed napkins. So we went to Jos and bought bolts of material and brought them home and started cutting them out, getting a tailor to help us with the seams and everything. We did order bedspreads from America from a friend. And they came out. Some of them to be stolen a little later.

Norm: I also read in one of the reports that you were given a [wedding] gift of money for silverware—and that you used that not for your own silverware but silverware for the whole school.

Gerry: Well, we needed it. There wasn't anything that we didn't need.

Norm: What difficulties did you face as you neared opening day?

Gerry: One problem we had was that a couple who was scheduled to come and be the houseparents didn't feel that they were able to do that. It was in December and school began in January, 1947. I was working on napkins when I heard that we didn't have any houseparents. And Paul was going to be building, and I was going to be teaching. I knew I couldn't do the kitchen on top of teaching and all. It was a course in Faith 101, you know. So, there was a couple over at the Rest Home named **Zabriskie**. Zeb had black water fever and almost died. He was at Miango recuperating, and they heard about this need. They went to the council and asked if maybe they could help establish this school. So one day I received a Black Magic [candy] tin filled with homemade marshmallows from Mrs. Zeb. On the top was a little card, and it said, "The Lord has not taught us to trust in His name and brought us this far to put us to shame." Then they told us that they would join us. They truly were God's gift to that school. Paul was 26. I was 22. No experience really. And certainly very little experience in Africa. We needed their stability. We needed their understanding of the African culture. They had established many mission stations and works like that up in French territory. And they were just a wonderful beginning.

Norm: How many students were there that first year?

Gerry: Well, it had a trial run. From about July to October in '46 there were five children, and SIM brought a schoolteacher in named **Olive Thrones**. The Craigs [Paul's parents] over at the Rest Home gave them two cottages. Olive lived with the little girls. Paul lived with two little boys. And the Mission Rest Home fed everybody. After that the little term ended, and the following January we had thirteen kids.

Norm: What overall goals did you have as you began the school?

Paul: We wanted the school to be a school that had good qualifications. We wanted to have love shown to the kids who were coming to school and be the parents, and give direction to the school, instead of trying to be the teachers. Teachers come and go, but the parents we wanted to have on a permanent basis where there would be continuity.

Gerry: The goals that we had in mind at that time were that the children would grow as Jesus grew—*in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man*—whether they were on the playground, in the classroom or at the dining room table, wherever. We wanted them to grow well rounded and come home really prepared to get back into school and have a good solid foundation for their lives.

Norm: And you had not only United States children. You had Canada. You had England.

Gerry: In time we had them all. We had a couple of British children right there at the beginning, the Williams children.

Norm: Tell us about the trial run that you had before the official opening day in January '47. How did you manage to open school in 1947 without a dorm?

Paul: That was a real questionable thing because we still used two homes in the Rest Home for the children. We had the boys, Gerry and I.

Gerry: We had the girls, Dear, [laughs] and the Zabriskies had the boys.

Paul & Gerry Craig with Irene & Zeb Zabriskie

Paul: And so we divided up and had it that way. We had a wonderful experience because we were waiting for God to supply the need that we had. As you know, the new dormitory building which would be for the boys and the girls and the parents and a teacher was in the process of being built, and I went ahead and built the school building as far as possible. We were waiting to do it because we knew that the rains were coming, but I went ahead and built the windows and doors and plastered the walls with Dutch plaster. And we even went ahead and painted some of them.

I believe we had many parents coming over from the Rest Home and guests who questioned the fact that we should go ahead and make it this far without having a roof on. But we were promised that pans were coming from New York. It so happened that God had touched the heart of a man to give $2000 which would pay for the pans, and we patiently waited for those pans and

they came. When the pans did come, I commandeered all the men who were at the Rest Home, getting hammers and pinchers that they needed, and we began to put the roof on, the corrugated aluminum roof. Try punching a nail into hard mahogany! We made it and finished the roof just before the rains came. That was a real testimony to the native population because they wanted the rains, and we were holding them off by prayer, and God worked things out for us in a marvelous way.

Gerry: I think it was a good thing for the KA kids to pray for these rains not coming yet. Every night we would hear the thunder coming around, and they realized that the Lord had, in a sense, done a miracle for us to keep that building.

c. 1947-49 (by 1950 you don't see students with helmets, just hats)

Paul: I must say this, though, that I think one of the real reasons that God did so much for us was because of Mother and Dad—I was staying at the Rest Home at that time. We would have tea in the morning about 10:00, and then about twenty minutes after, we would spend about another half hour in prayer for the school. And I am sure that God listened to the prayers at that time and worked wonders for us. Because when we met first about building, the question came up, "What about finances?" **Mr. Kirk** said, "Well, there are no finances; you will just have to trust God." And that's what we did.

Norm: Was it difficult to find people for the staff since they had come to Africa to work with the Nigerians?

Gerry: The Mission chose the people who came to Kent Academy. You had to hand it to these people because they had come thinking they were going to work with the Africans on bush stations and in the schools and things. And they came to us and they taught American and Canadian and English kids. Some of them for a very little time, and some of them stayed a number of years. And we are grateful for all of them.

Norm: Tell us about some of the good times.

Gerry: One of the ones that I loved best was Stocking Night before the kids went home for Christmas. To watch the children. Each time we were on furlough we would get stocking stuffers, and we would go back with everything from yoyos to little dolls and pocket combs and who knows what not. And the parents would come over the night before, and we had them all divvied up, and the parents wrapped everything, stuffed the stockings together with oranges and candy and whatever, and we hung them on this great chain across the fireplace, and the children loved that. And we loved the fellowship with the parents the night before too.

Another thing that we think about often is the marionette show. Because the children were small, or at least young, we had to have two people for each character. One to work the marionette, and another one to be the voice. All of the pairs would get together at rest hour with the marionettes that they had made, and practice. Before the marionettes got made, Paul and others took sawdust and glue and made the heads for these things. And then somebody came along and made the bodies and stuffed them, and then we got the clothes sewn. Then the next person would thread the arms and legs and feet and all. They were very good, and we had a lot of fun with that.

Norm: I remember Sunday walks. I remember memorizing scripture, learning many choruses. Those were great times. Some of the bad times were deaths. **Barbara Swanson**, **Beulah Herr**, the **Goossen** father and son. What about rabid dogs and adventurous runways?

Gerry: We need to correct the idea that a rabid dog fell into the dam. If it did, it happened after we had left. Normally rabid dogs don't go anywhere near the water. But one day I was taking my son Jim home to bed. And I had left the lunchroom and here this dog came right through the quadrangle up to the boys' dorm; and I heard the little dog, Vicki, owned by the Herrs, yelping. And then this dog came careening back, and he had a lot of saliva on him and everything. I parked Jim on the big rock in the middle of the compound and I said, "Don't move." I went into the dining room to get Paul. He went for the shotgun and followed the dog down the road and did away with it. In the meantime I went back to the rock to get Jim. And here the dog, Vickie, covered with all this saliva, had sought comfort in my son's arms, and he had the scratches all over his hands and everything. So I took him into the house, washed him real well. Paul took us straight to **Dr. Roger Troup**, and he said, "We can't even ask questions about scratches. You and Jim have to have 14 shots to the tummy." So we don't like rabid dogs in our family.

Norm: Now Dr. Troup was in Jos?

Gerry: Yes.

Norm: That's twenty-three miles away.

Gerry: That's right. Any crisis, that's what we had to do.

Norm: And that's not like twenty-three miles on these roads either.

Gerry: No, once upon a time we counted the curves. I don't know if it is sixty-some. All those curves on the way to the city.

Norm: Tell us about epidemics. Was it hard to deal with some of them?

Gerry: Yes, we had measles, mumps, chicken

pox—which was particularly awful. The children would scratch, and we didn't want them to remove the scabs so that they would be scarred for life. It was just really a hard epidemic. And then flu. One of the worst epidemics we had, Dr. Troup sent a nurse out to help us because there were kids in the infirmary and kids in bedrooms and kids everywhere. And the staff at KA were exhausted, and so I remember that one with no love at all.

Norm: In the early years how did you contact parents?

Paul: We contacted the parents through the radio. That was through Jos. Then when the children wrote home, Gerry would drop a note at the end of the kids' letters and tell how the children were getting along. So that made a good feeling to the parents so that they knew we were looking out for their children.

Gerry: One problem was that in the early years, we didn't really have a radio that we could radio in from Miango to Jos. We would have to drive in, tell the Mission headquarters, and then they would telephone Kano or Sokoto or . . . . And then at the other end they would have to send a driver out to contact parents if a child was really sick or something.

Norm: Now this mail—you talked about writing home to parents. Was this mail by Nigerian postal service?

Gerry: Yes, and the kids would write on Sundays when they had to be quiet anyway and before their walks. And then if they wanted to seal up their letter, that's fine; I would write on the envelopes—whatever. Just to say that all was well or Johnny was over his cold or whatever.

Norm: How many MKs passed though Kent Academy when you were there?

Gerry: Paul and I think that between 150 and 200 in those years. And of course many more after that.

Norm: All right, one final question here: A comment about God's provision of people who had information or skills or power which helped Kent Academy . . . .

Paul: Let me talk to you about that because, at the very beginning, the building process was new to me. But when it came to building, there were South Africa missionaries who had built with adobe brick, and they knew what proportions of sand and cement and worm casts could be put together to form a plaster that would stick. So that was one of the things.

And the South African gentleman came to Miango, and he taught me how to plan the septic tanks and plumbing. Those were things that had to be done by someone who knew things about it, and he taught me that. And we had our welder, who knew how to bend rods for concrete, who came when we built the main building. He was one that built the turrets on the tanks in the Second World War. So God sent us people like that.

One of the books that helped me was Mr. Dancy's book on building. And it was Ray Davis's book on building dams. The main reason we had a good water supply was because of the *Popular Mechanics* that I read here in the States. It told how to build a water supply for farmers, building dams, filter beds and all of these things that were needed to make safe water for farmers. But I used the same principles for building the dam and the water system in Nigeria.

Gerry: There is one last story that I think everybody should know. When **Mother and Dad Craig** in their earlier years were down in Isanlu, Nigeria, an assistant district officer came with his bride to that little town. And his bride took very, very sick. The mission station had lots of fruit trees on it, and Mother Craig made sure that they had lots of fruit. Because in the government compound there they didn't seem to have much. And the young people were very thankful for Mother and Dad Craig. Years and years later, we were building Kent Academy. We heard that the land was only leased and no more people could have any more leased land on the Plateau, and Kent Academy was bursting at the seams. We needed the road all the way down where the teachers' houses and the track, I think, was down there, and so we didn't know what to do because of what the government said.

My father-in-law bumped into this young assistant officer, now gray. His name was Mr. Niven. And he had become the head district officer of the Bauchi Plateau and was working in Jos. The man recognized Dad, and Dad said, "Why don't you come out and visit some time?"

And he said, "I'd love to." And so he did, and then after, they had had tea and everything and looked around Miango.

"Do you want to come over and see the school?"

"Well, yes."

And so he took him around the school. And then he said. "What would you advise us to do? We don't know how to make more room. We need this room for the children and the teachers' homes and that kind of thing. But we hear that we can't get any more land on the plateau. What would you advise us?"

And Mr. Niven said, "Well you could write to Kaduna. They could only say 'no.'" And so the Mission did. Well, in a few months the person at Kaduna, who was the big honcho in the northern provinces there, took very ill, and he went home to England and guess who was sent to Kaduna just in time to approve of our request? And so that's how we got the extra land.

Norm: That is amazing. Amazing. And I know these are only a few of the stories. I have read about and seen so much of God's hand and blessing over Kent Academy over the last 60 years. And I think this brings to the end our interview, but we do want to send our greetings to all of you who are meeting at Kent Academy and celebrating the 60th anniversary of Kent Academy, and I thank so much Paul and Gerry Craig for their faithful vision and their perseverance. I read some of the early reports of others that weren't so sure that this would work. That this could fly. And because of their vision God has blessed in amazing ways in the past 60 years through the ministry of Kent Academy.

Paul: In closing we would like to add our personal greetings to **Jim Crouch** and the family and especially for this 60th anniversary there in Nigeria. We do appreciate all that they are doing now for a different group of people—the Nigerians—which we feel is wonderful. Kent Academy began, and we were part of that beginning. And now it is continuing, for which we are most grateful to God.

Gerry: And I would like to add, *"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it."* And God did build Kent Academy. We are so grateful that our own Kent Academy kids are in charge, and thank you, Linda and Jim, for all you have done. And we thank each one of you. We pray for God's blessing on that school and each one of you.

Paul and Gerry Craig
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Letters to the Editor

Dear Karen,

My Dad suffered a major stroke in Nigeria and had to be airlifted back to the States. He has good and not-so-good days, but he's convalescing comfortably in his spacious duplex with devoted caregivers around the clock.

The other day I wheeled him in front of his beautiful grand piano and propped up an old hymnal. He picked out the melody of "His Eye Is on the Sparrow" with his left hand while I sang and thought about all the hard-bitten churches we'd performed in across the world forty years ago.

He bobbled a note, shook his head and muttered, "Not so hot."

"You never were too hot on the piano," I said. It's true, and he cocked his head at me and laughed. But it's also true that he was a masterful violinist and musical arranger—his latest composition still spread out behind the hymnal—and we can only pray that he reclaims more of his powers in the days to come.

I hope you'll publish this open letter of thanks from our family to friends, old and new, who saved his life and got him home.

Tim Kraakevik

(kraakevik@voyager.net)

Dear *Simroots*,

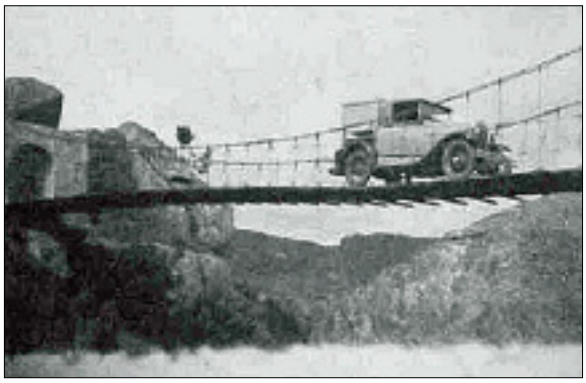
This picture was taken May 30, 1938, somewhere between Vom and Jos, Nigeria. **Gerrie Lou (Thamer) Culbert** thinks it is the swinging bridge near Miango where she and others played. The inscription on the back is written by my mother, Ethel Thamer and says: "Dad (Orville Thamer, Sr.) rebuilt and enlarged this bridge for cars, and ours is the first. **Gene** inside 18 days old."

I believe dad rebuilt the truck in the picture as well from parts of two vehicles he was given by a British mine owner in Yoruba country. He built schools, repaired cars, trucks, radios, and motorcycles and was even asked for help to assemble one of the first SIM Piper Cubs.

I wonder how many more wonderful stories are hidden in the archives, albums, and hearts of all us MKs?

Gene Thamer

(ethamer@ebtech.net)



Swinging Bridge

ELWA kids, 1981

Dear Karen,

I have enjoyed reading each issue of *Simroots*. It is fun to see what former students are doing today. I taught at ELWA Academy from 1970-1990. Then at Bingham 1991-1999. I am now on Leave of Absence from SIM. I have been living in Imperial, CA, taking care of my mother who turned 92 in April. I have been teaching at a Christian day school, Faith Academy, here in Imperial. I've taught kindergarten, first and combo first/second.

Enclosed is a photo of an ELWA kindergarten. **Joyce Corey** is on the far left. The boy on the far right is a **Warden**.

Fran Eager

(franeager@sbcglobal.net)

Dear Karen,

Just I received *Simroots* and thank you for it. I was amazed to find a number of pictures, which are familiar to me. On page 6: ELWA guesthouse, but now larger than when we stayed there, and the beach on page 7. Then our son **John** during his Bingham time on page 8 and on page 20 with Ato Yaicob Gebetu the Ethiopian builder, when we both helped last year to erect the roof of the large church in Soddo. Mrs. Hagen and I have moved into the home of retired missionaries of the DMG (German Mission Board).

Johannes & Brigitte Hagen

(joh.hagen@VR-Web.de)

Hi Karen,

We remember when you were in *Anne of Green Gables*. My parents were staying at MRH and brought my younger brothers to see the play. At one point you made a dramatic statement, and in the silence that followed, my two-year-old brother Grant stamped his foot on the pew and yelled out the same words mimicking you so perfectly. It was just too precious! The audience howled with laughter and my mom was mortified! It has just been such a fun memory for our family all these years!

We can't quite agree as to what the words were. Would they have been "Never! Never! Never!" or would they have been "I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!" Please help us solve this family argument!

Debbie (Jones) Warren (KA, HC, 77)

(debbiencj@netscape.net)

Dear Debbie,

The answer to the question IF my memory serves me right is "Never! Never! Never!" I believe what lead up to the statement was my response to Gilbert Blythe for calling me "Carrots," and I said I'd never forgive him for it.

Karen

PHOTO CORRECTIONS

In the Mozart & Hiawatha photo, Vol. 22 #2, the person in the striped bathrobe has definitely been identified as Dave Langdon, thanks to his Mom Lois!

Simroots Vol. 21 #1 Miss Pat's Pioneer Girls

Back row: Confirmed: Esther Ockers
Change: Bonnie Kleinsasser to Sherrill McElheren
Last girl on right: Lillian Powers
Front row, 3rd from left: Dellwynn Elliott
2nd from right: Peggy Brandt

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Occupation _____

High school graduation year (based on U.S. system end of grade 12) _____

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